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English 385:
'England in 1819'



Literary critics have often bestowed a disproportionate degree of attention on the period known as 'Romantic'. Only fifty or so years in duration, that era produced some of the most recognizable names in canonical literary and intellectual history. Yet while the number of novelists, poets, dramatists and writers of other stripes may distinguish the period as a moment of extraordinary creativity, there is something else equally remarkable about the group of English writings we designate as 'Romantic'. Those texts exhibit an awareness, in various ways, of the moment and movement of which they are a part: a self-consciousness, in other words, of their own role within literary record and of their collective place in (and as) history.

In this course we will examine Romantic writings from a number of perspectives. In the first instance we will encounter a collection of writers who knew or knew of one another and responded personally and professionally to their role within a field of literary culture. At the same time, this will be a survey that has distinct temporal borders. We will examine texts written, published or drafted in the year '1819' as a means

of reviewing the relation of Romantic literature to questions of historical consciousness and context, and the obsessive interest of early nineteenth century writers in classifying 'the spirit of the age'. As the title of the course suggests, we are considering both a time and place in English literary history, *and* a series of texts (by Percy Shelley and James Chandler, to name two) which deliberately specify their historical interest in that moment. Finally, the class will also consider whether the act of positioning Romantic literature in its historical context inevitably leads us to share its blindness and its ideology.

For those familiar with Romantic writings, it might go without saying that 1819 is a significant year in British literary and political history. John Keats wrote almost all of his major poetry, including the Great Odes; Byron published the first two cantos of *Don Juan*; Walter Scott published three novels, including *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *Ivanhoe*; Shelley produced a phenomenal array of radical and lyric poetry, not to mention his dramatic masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*. And only four years after the battle of Waterloo, the 'Peterloo' massacre took place on English soil, in which the British army fired on an unarmed crowd of men, women and children taking part in a peaceful demonstration for reform. One of the central challenges of the semester will therefore involve puzzling the relationships, if any, between these events and texts. At the end of the course I hope you will have formed a better understanding of Romantic-era literature and its intimate relation with – and as one of – the extraordinary events of its time.

The course has three primary goals:

- **To enable students to learn about Romantic-era British Literature.** In the course of the semester, you will be introduced to a considerable variety of canonical British writers, all of whom had a profound effect on early nineteenth century literary culture. You will be expected to research and absorb any contextual information provided and to read the introductions to each of the texts we consider. Occasionally there may be quizzes to assist you in assimilating this material.
- **To develop skills in the critical analysis of literature, and to evaluate the role and relevancy of historical context.** Class periods will be devoted to detailed discussion of the literary works assigned for the day. In some cases, we will only talk about one or two of the poems, or a few lines from a longer work. The goal is for you to practice "close reading", and for you to be able to apply those techniques to the literature we *haven't* explicitly discussed. A good reader is a reader sensitive to the nuances of written communication, and its relationship to social and historical context. As such, you should be able to understand aspects of literary form as well as the particular contextual meanings of writings.
- **To develop skills in communicating your knowledge of literature.** The course includes a number of writings assignments arranged to encourage the development of your critical analysis and research abilities. You will be writing two shorter essays on literary texts, and one extended essay where you bring in outside sources to create argument. As part of that extended essay, you will submit a plan and an annotated bibliography earlier in the semester.

The course is open to declared or prospective English majors only.

Required Texts:

Scott, Walter. The Bride of Lammermoor (Oxford University Press, 1998)

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. (W. W. Norton & Co., 1996)

Recommended Texts:

Romanticism: An Anthology (3rd edition) ed. Duncan Wu (Blackwell, 2005)

Course Format

The class meets twice a week in a seminar and discussion format. Often this will be preceded by a short introduction by me introducing a topic or proposing a new idea. You will be expected to complete all readings assigned for the class and prepare for class discussions upon them. Sometimes I will supply you with particular questions of tasks to guide you in your preparation. This will mean preparing the answers in advance to particular questions so you are able to talk about them when called upon. Participation in discussion is a vital part of this course and your overall semester grade will reflect that. With each reading you should expect to comment or pose questions about it, as well as challenge or test the ideas within it. By participating in class discussion, your analytic skills and interpretative strategies will be strengthened and your experience of a particular text will be enriched. This may seem like a daunting task, but if you are nervous about speaking up in class, look on this as a personal challenge. I would like everyone to set themselves the task of saying something in each class.

Course Requirements**Formal Essays**

You will complete two shorter essays of 4-6 pages. These will be on a selection of subjects from each half of the semester. These need not involve use of outside critical sources, though you may use them if you wish. There will also be one extended essay (10-12 pages), which will also require a formally submitted plan and annotated bibliography two weeks in advance of the final essay submission. This 'extended' essay explicitly requires the use of secondary critical sources and historical context, thereby improving and testing your skill as a researcher. More information will be given in the course of the semester on this project. I encourage students to choose some aspect of the course texts which interests them, and upon which they have not already submitted work. Although in essence this might be called a research essay, it might be helpful to think of this as a more intensive exploration of some element that interests you, rather than bear the psychological burden of 'original' research.

All assignments must be typed in 12pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced with margins of one inch. Full format details can be found in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (sixth edition) in the library or by emailing me. Although I assume this will mean there are approximately 300 words on each page, every paper must include a **word count, your name, my name and a title**. Every paper must be proofread for grammatical and spelling errors. Your grade will reflect the appropriate penalties if errors are not corrected.

Final exam

At the end of the course there may be an in-class assignment that will ask you to demonstrate your understanding of the course concepts and discuss a variety of the works which we have read in class.

Participation and Discussion

Your participation is crucial to this course and it involves not only attendance, but reading and preparation before class, and contribution during. I will expect each person I call on during class time to be prepared and willing to speak. If at any point a student is not able to participate in an adequate manner or is unprepared for the class, they will be counted as absent for that session.

• Essay 1	4-6 pages	20%
• Essay 2	4-6 pages	20%
• Proposal & Annotated Bib.	3-5 pages	10%
• Extended Essay	10-12 pages	30%
• Class presentations/ final		10%
• Participation & Discussion		10%

PLEASE NOTE: You will not receive a passing grade unless you submit all written assignments.

Attendance Policy:

You are expected to be in class everyday. This means that you will be present, fully awake, prepared and ready to contribute to class activities. Failure to meet the terms of that definition may result in a student being marked absent. You may miss three classes in the term without penalty (for illness, sickness, religious holidays or other absences). Further absences will result in your final grade for the entire course being lowered a third of a point (i.e. From B+ to B, from B- to C+). More than six absences will result in failure of the course.

Honor Code:

Please make sure you are absolutely clear about the terms of the honor code. All written work must be your own. Under no circumstances will any form of intellectual dishonesty be tolerated. You should be aware that the consequences are severe. If you are ever unsure whether you might be violating the code, please contact me or another professor to find out.

Disabilities

If you have a disability, please contact me in advance of the class to discuss any additional requirements you may have, such as large print handouts or extra time in assessments.

Grading Scale

Essays and the final grade are calculated on scale from A-F, including pluses and minuses in between. You will have an opportunity to ask questions about criteria in detail before each assignment. A grade of 'A' indicates excellent and outstanding work; 'B' is a good grade and, in the case of B+, a very good grade; 'C' is a passing grade; 'D' indicates poor or shoddy work; 'F' is a failing grade and indicates work that is unacceptable.